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Opposition takes exception to yet another Adiala sit-in crackdown

TTAP says struggle to continue despite govt 'heavy-handedness'

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: After the Punjab police dispersed protesters outside the Adiala jail in the small hours of Wednesday, the opposition alliance, led by the PTI, denounced the use of water cannons against the family members of ex-prime minister Imran Khan and other party supporters.

This is the third time the police have used force to break up the sit-in outside the prison. Imran's sisters Aleema Khan, Uzma Khan, and Noreen Niazi, besides scores of supporters, have been staging weekly protests outside the jail to demand a meeting with Mr Khan.

Videos shared by the PTI Punjab account on the social media platform X after 1am showed water cannons targeting protesters. "In the severe cold, an attack with water cannons was carried out on unarmed, peaceful children, women, and citizens," the X post said.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan condemned the use of water cannons and the arrest of Imran's sisters and other PTI workers. The police, in a late-night operation, used water cannon to disperse the protesters and also arrested the sisters. However, they were later released near Chakri on the motorway.

In its statement, the opposition alliance alleged that the water used to scatter the PTI supporters was laced with a chemical and hundreds of supporters were "badly affected". The TTAP spokesperson said that such tactics would not deter them from their stance that the violation of basic human rights should be stopped. They will continue the struggle, the statement added.

On the other hand, the PTI shared another list of six persons with the Adiala Jail administration, requesting it to allow them to meet Imran Khan on Thursday. The letter, written to the Adiala jail superintendent and signed by Secretary General Salman Akram Raja, mentioned Dr Amjad, Sibghatullah, Usman Bhattani, Jamal Khan, Iqbal Khattak, and Shoaib Ameer Awan.

A court order issued by the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on March 24 has mandated that meetings with Imran will be permitted twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, the PTI maintains that the court order was not being complied with.

A VIEW of Quetta's mountains, draped in snow. Icy Siberian winds lashed the provincial capital on Wednesday.—PPI

Three killed as rain and snow lash Balochistan

By Saleem Shahid and Ali Jan Mangi

QUETTA/DERA MURAD JAMALI: Three members of a family were killed and three others injured in rain-related incidents across Balochistan as rain and snowfall, lashing the provincial capital and several other parts of province for the last 24 hours, continued on Wednesday.

Icy Siberian winds that started blowing in Quetta and other northern areas of Balochistan continued, forcing people to stay indoors as mercury dropped to sub-zero temperatures.

According to officials, three members of a family were killed in a colony in Dera Murad Jamali when the roof of their mud house collapsed due to heavy downpour that continued throughout the night.

Meanwhile, power breakdowns, reduced gas pressure, traffic hazards and disruption of normal life were witnessed in Quetta and other towns and cities of the province during the last 24 hours. Heavy snowfall was reported in Ziarat, Qila Saifullah, Khojak Pass, Chaman, Toba Achakzai, Toba Kakari, Kan Mehtarzai, Khanozai, Muslim Bagh, Zhob, Pishin and other northern areas.

According to reports, traffic was affected on the Quetta-Chaman Highway at Khojak Pass, Kan Mehtarzai, Muslim Bagh and other link roads. Power supply was also suspended after the onset of rain and snowfall in many areas.

"At many places, highways became slippery, creating hurdles in the smooth flow of traffic," an official said, adding that the National Highway Authority (NHA) had deployed heavy machinery to remove snow and spread salt on roads.

Afghan border closure brings down terrorist violence

CRSS report says most significant surge in violence recorded in KP

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has recorded a significant drop in cross-border terrorist attacks and violence-linked fatalities after it closed down the border to Afghanistan on October 11.

Terrorist attacks went down by almost 17 per cent in December, preceded by 9 per cent decline in November. Terrorist violence-linked fatalities among civilians and security officials also fell in the last quarter of 2025, by nearly 4pc and 19pc each in November and December, shows data collected by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) as part of its annual security report 2025.

With an almost 34pc surge in overall violence, the year 2025 went by as the most violent year for Pakistan in a decade, says the report. The country has suffered a sustained escalation in violence for five consecutive years since 2021, coinciding with the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan; with almost 38pc in 2021, over 15pc in 2022, 56pc in 2023, nearly 67pc in 2024, and 34pc in 2025.

The comparative data for 2024 and 2025 reveals a sharp escalation in terrorism and counter-terrorism linked violence nationwide, with fatalities rising from 2555 in 2024 to 3417 in 2025, marking an increase of 862 deaths, or a roughly 34pc year-on-year surge in violence.

The most significant surge in violence was recorded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the fatalities rose from 1620 in 2024 to 2331 in 2025, an absolute increase of 711 deaths, accounting for over 82pc of the net national rise and marking almost a 44pc year-on-year surge in violence in the province.

Balochistan also had an upward trend, with fatalities increasing from 787 to 956; an additional 169 deaths, which are nearly 22pc higher than the previous year's figures.

Regional impact of violence

Violence remained heavily concentrated in the country's northwestern KP and southwestern Balochistan provinces, with both accounting for over 96pc of all fatalities and almost 93pc of violent incidents recorded during the entire 2025.

KP was the worst-hit region, suffering over 68pc (2331) of the total violence-linked fatalities, and around 63pc (795) of the incidents of violence, followed by Balochistan, accounting for 28pc (956) of the fatalities and over 30pc (386) of the incidents of violence.

In contrast, Punjab and Sindh experienced comparatively lower levels of violence. The former recorded 25 incidents of violence resulting in 40 fatalities and 24 injuries, representing just 1.15pc of total casualties, while the latter saw 51 incidents causing 56 fatalities and 40 injuries; 1.73pc of the total.

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the Islamabad Capital Territory though incidents numbers remained minimal, the injury figures were relatively high, with the former recording 103 injuries, and the latter registering 38, from just five incidents at each location.

Gilgit-Baltistan remained the least affected region. Compared to last year, though small in absolute numbers, the region recorded a four-fold increase from one to four fatalities.

Punjab bans land mutations based on oral transactions

By Imran Gabol

LAHORE: The Punjab government on Wednesday imposed a complete ban on the registration and approval of land transfers based on oral transactions in a bid to ensure transparency, legality and proper documentation in the process of land transfers.

The Board of Revenue (BoR) issued comprehensive instructions on Tuesday, under the Punjab Land Revenue Act and other relevant laws, imposing a complete ban on the registration and sanction of land mutations based on oral transactions.

According to a notification, no mutation shall be entered or sanctioned on the basis of an oral transaction in cases of sale, mortgage, exchange, or gift.

However, inheritance cases have been exempted from this restriction and will continue to be sanctioned strictly in accordance with the law.

The BoR has further clarified that the transfer of land rights will only be recognised when supported by a duly registered instrument, as required under the Registration Act, 1908, read with the Transfer of Property Act, 1882.

In all matters relating to sale, mortgage, exchange, and gift, oral claims — other than inheritance — have been declared inadmissible.

Following the issuance of the notification, Multan Division Commissioner Amir Karim Khan directed all revenue officers to ensure strict compliance with these instructions.

In this regard, the commissioner's office has formally conveyed the directives to deputy commissioners, assistant commissioners, tehsildars, and naib tehsildars for immediate implementation.

The commissioner has warned that any violation of the instructions will result in disciplinary action against the concerned officers under the applicable service rules.

He emphasised that the ban on oral transactions has come into force with immediate effect and that no leniency will be shown in its enforcement.

Commissioner Khan stated the decision is a step towards ensuring transparency and legal compliance in the mutation system.

He added that the ban on oral land transactions is an effective measure to curb land mafia activities, fraudulent practices, and illegal transfers, while safeguarding public rights and reinforcing the credibility of the revenue administration system.

First vaccine policy finalised to shift from imports

Proposes creating an alliance; draft will be forwarded to prime minister for approval

By Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's first National Vaccine Policy has proposed creating a National Vaccine Alliance to reduce imports as a strategic and economic move, as all vaccines used in the country were currently imported.

The draft policy estimates Pakistan's annual vaccine requirement at 125 to 150 million doses in 2024-25 and suggests multi-year contracts of up to 10 years to reduce investment risks and cut reliance on imports.

Prepared by the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap), the policy was finalised on Wednesday at meeting of a high-level committee formed by the prime minister.

Chairing the meeting, its chairman, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan, announced that the policy would be forwarded to the premier for approval and implementation.

The meeting was co-chaired by Federal Minister for National Health Services Mustafa Kamal.

On capacity, the draft notes that Pakistan currently has only three vaccine manufacturing facilities: the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Islamabad, Amson Vaccines and Pharma in Islamabad, and Dow University in Karachi.

Only one private facility produces limited vaccines, such as tetanus toxoid and hepatitis B, and it is not WHO-prequalified, restricting market access.

The NIH's infrastructure is largely limited to small-scale fill-and-finish operations and would require major upgrades for end-to-end manufacturing.

To build capacity, the policy proposes a phased approach, starting with fill-and-finish operations, followed by technology transfer or joint ventures, and eventually full upstream production.

It acknowledges that WHO prequalification can take more than five years and prioritises meeting domestic needs first.

Around 40 different vaccines are administered in the country, of which 13 are included in the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI).

However, due to the lack of local production, all vaccines are imported, including some from India.

Guiding principles

The policy lays out guiding principles for developing local vaccine manufacturing to strengthen national health security, achieve self-sufficiency, enhance pandemic preparedness, and create a sustainable domestic market with export potential. For FY 2025–26, the government will contribute 49 per cent of vaccine costs, while Gavi will cover 51 pc.

Pakistan is expected to enter the accelerated transition phase by 2030, followed by a five- to eight-year path to full self-financing.

The policy warns that reduced subsidies will increase pressure on public finances at a time when vaccine-preventable diseases remain a challenge.

To address these risks, it proposes establishing a National Vaccine Alliance under the Ministry of National Health Services as a coordination platform to guide investment and avoid duplication.

The alliance would include representatives from Drap, the pharmaceutical industry, public-sector manufacturers, the Federal Directorate of Immunisation, the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority, academic institutions, development partners, and the Board of Investment.

Under its proposed mandate, the alliance would recommend buy-back guarantees or long-term procurement mechanisms, facilitate access to domestic and export markets, propose financing tools such as vaccine innovation funds and advance market commitments, and advise on regulatory reforms and incentive structures. The policy identifies high entry costs and the absence of sovereign procurement guarantees as the main barriers to local vaccine manufacturing.

Under the proposed buy-back framework, the draft calls for amendments to procurement rules to prioritise locally produced, non-WHO-prequalified vaccines once they pass lot release testing.

It proposes framework contracts of up to 10 years, with prices and volumes indexed to import parity benchmarks and efficiency targets.

Long-term contracts would be tied to technology transfer milestones, requiring manufacturers to move from fill-and-finish operations to full-scale production within the contract period.

President, PM urge unity

By Bakhtawar Mian

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday called upon the people and political forces to recommit themselves to safeguarding the country amid global, domestic challenges and hailed the nation's resilience and paid tribute to the country's martyrs.

In their separate New Year messages, they praised the nation's resilience in the face of economic and security challenges.

In his message, President Zardari urged the people and political forces to recommit themselves to safeguard the country's shared future amid mounting global and domestic challenges.

In his New Year message, PM Shehbaz hailed the nation's resilience and paid tribute to its martyrs while pledging to accelerate economic reforms and uphold Pakistan's role for global peace.

'Hybrid' rule tightens grip as security prevails over democracy in 2025

• Pildat report finds democratic institutions intact in form but constrained in practice • Says civilian govt endorses security-centric approach as regional tensions grow

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: With security taking precedence over democracy, year 2025 was characterised by consolidation and normalisation of the hybrid governance model rather than its disruption. While the democratic institutions are intact in form, their functioning has become increasingly constrained by a security-driven governance paradigm.

This has been observed in an Assessment of the Quality of Democracy in Pakistan 2025, released by Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (Pildat) on the last day of an eventful year. The security-driven environment, particularly since the brief but intense Pakistan-India armed conflict in May 2025, has further entrenched the security establishment's influence over all matters, including democratic institutions and governance in Pakistan.

This "hybrid" model has the full endorsement of the civilian government, which increasingly views democracy through the lens of state survival. Regional security developments, including tensions with India and Afghanistan, alongside persistent internal insurgencies and intense political polarisation, have all contributed to Pakistan's reversion to becoming a security-centric state.

Pildat notes that rather than strengthening civilian institutions, the role of "hybrid" entities such as the SIFC continued to expand, which operate outside conventional ministerial and parliamentary oversight structures.

At the same time, the appointment of serving and retired military officers to civilian administrative posts, including the appointment of a serving major general to a key interior ministry position in August 2025, also blur the boundary between civilian governance and security institutions.

Pildat assessment highlights that 2025 marked the institutionalisation of a hybrid governance model in which democratic institutions operate within parameters increasingly defined by security threats and priorities as they now override democratic norms and principles.

27th Amendment

Highlighting some key institutional developments during 2025, Pildat report says the parliament passed the consequential 27th Constitutional Amendment with limited debate and consensus. It observed that parliamentary representativeness and oversight were also weakened by continuing vacancies in the offices of Leader of the Opposition in both houses. Executive authority remained formally civilian but substantively constrained. The prime minister and defence minister's statements regarding governing in collaboration with the establishment exemplified the formalisation of the hybrid model.

Judiciary experienced significant structural changes during 2025 as the constitutional amendment created a new Federal Constitutional Court, continued operation of military courts for civilians as well as high-profile accountability proceedings conducted under exceptional conditions collectively raised concerns regarding due process.

The security establishment's role in national decision-making became even more prominent after major terrorist incidents, continued instability along the western border, and the India-Pakistan confrontation in 2025.

Restructuring

This was reflected in the restructuring of the military command through constitutional amendment, the elevation of the chief of army staff (COAS) to the rank of field marshal and increasing commentary by representatives of security institutions on governance and political issues.

The COAS was formally notified to the additional role of chief of defence forces (CDF) in December 2025. Later, his term as COAS-cum-CDF was extended till December 2030, with the possibility of another extension till 2035.

In practice, the security sector operated with limited parliamentary oversight in 2025. The civilian government openly embraced a hybrid governance model, publicly endorsing joint civilian-military decision-making. By late 2025, the military establishment was also increasingly vocal in commenting on governance failures.

In November, the DG ISPR described lack of governance in certain areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as partially responsible for resurgence of terror attacks. A month earlier, the DG ISPR had warned against bringing in "anti-state" political leadership in KP. This increasingly open participation in governance and political discourse also reflected formalisation of the hybrid model.

This hybrid model was reflected in the prominent role of the field marshal in both governance and diplomacy. He was present at events such as the Mineral Investment Forum 2025 in April and held exclusive meetings with various foreign dignitaries — including US President Trump in June, whom he then again met with the prime minister by his side in September 2025.

It referred to the court martial and sentencing to 14 years' rigorous imprisonment of former DG of ISI, retired Lt Gen Faiz Hameed, saying it marked an unprecedented accountability action within the security establishment.